



Sports

Bryant wins Mavericks' QB battle

By Chad Courrier
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MANKATO — As Minnesota State offensive coordinator Dan Ragsdale put it: "I don't know if there was a question about (who the starting quarterback will be) when spring practice started, but that question was answered the first day. (Joshua Bryant) is far and away our guy."

On a cold, rainy and windy day, the Mavericks held their annual spring football game in front of about 100 fans at



MSU quarterback Joshua Bryant performed well enough this spring to win the top spot at his position heading into the fall.

Blakeslee Stadium on Saturday, wrapping up the monthlong offseason practice period with a 25-6 victory for the defense.

Behind center was Bryant, who a year ago was nervous and confused when he took the

snap.

"Last year, I don't think I ever had an understanding of how coach (Garin Higgins) wanted me to run the offense," Bryant said. "With coach Ragsdale, from Day 1, I knew what he expected to me to do. I'm more composed and a lot more relaxed."

On the first drive Saturday, while the footballs were still dry, Bryant completed 4 of 6 passes for 54 yards, capped by a 23-yard touchdown to Tyrell

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Minnesota State's Derrick Murph tries (37) to get away from defensive tackle Brad Diel during the annual spring football game Saturday at Blakeslee Stadium.

Samantha Severson

MAVERICKS: Running back still up for grabs

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Smith. For the game, Bryant was 10 of 17 for 109 yards with an interception, working more effectively than backups Ryan Fick and Cohlman Rutschow. Senior Ben King, who missed last year to concentrate on baseball, did not play because of an academic conflict.

"I don't think anybody on our team doesn't know who our quarterback is," Ragsdale said. "But we still need him to grow for us to go places."

Last season, Bryant, a transfer from Mesabi Range Community & Technical College, started four games, completing 78 of 133 passes for

806 yards with five touchdowns and three interceptions. But he never appeared comfortable in the pocket, rushing 67 times for 94 yards and four scores.

"I didn't feel like myself, and I wasn't sure what I was doing," Bryant said. "I wasn't making the plays I could make and didn't live up to my potential. Now, I'm more confident."

Coach Jeff Jamrog said his team made strides in a lot of areas this spring, most concerning depth. He said the offensive line might be set, and it doesn't include Adam VanZeeland, a second-team all-conference pick last season. Jamrog said that right now, tackles Sarkis Bedoyan and Adrian Battles,

guards Andy Schoonover and Kory Anderson and center Zach Verdin are the starting unit.

Defensively, he wants to see improvement from the linebacker. Freshman Tony Hunter didn't play Saturday with a knee injury, but Steve Porter and Chad Breeden, who made an interception, stepped in. In the defensive line, Jamrog said for the first time, he can rotate eight guys in the four positions, and nose guard Spencer Dickinson's play has been one of the spring highlights.

"For the first time, we may have some arguments in the coaches' meetings on which 55 guys we take on the traveling team," Jamrog said.

The one position that stills remains undecided is tailback, where Bryan Alberty, Dan Smedberg, Julian Phipps, Derrick Murph and Ernest Walker have battled all spring. Alberty rushed 16 times for 34 yards and caught four passes for 23 yards Saturday. Smedberg had four rushes for 19 yards and one catch for five yards, Phipps had four carries for 15 yards. Murph had five rushes for 13 yards, and Walker carried twice for five yards.

"I don't know if our starting tailback is on campus right now," Ragsdale said. "Right now, we don't have one. That's a position battle that we'll take into the fall."